

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T STATE 281668

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FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 7839 ACTIONSECSTATE DTD 15 NOV

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 7839

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FOR THE SECRETARY MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, US XF
SUBJECT: ASAD DISCUSSES PEACE PROCESS

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 7767, (B) STATE 279090, (C) STATE 273497

1. SUMMARY:

ASAD AFFIRMS HE UNDERSTANDS NEED TO WAIT FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT
TO STUDY ME QUESTIONS IN DEPT AND NOT SPECULATE ABOUT POLICIES OF NEW
ADMINISTRATION. EXPRESSED OPTIMISM RE

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PEACE PROCESS IN LEBANON. HARDEST QUESTION IS TO

ESTIMATE PERIOD IT WILL TAKE TO ACHIEVE REAL PEACE BUT
HE BELIEVES COUNTRY-WIDE CEASE-FIRE AND COLLECTION OF
HEAVY WEAPONS SHOULD BE ACHIEVABLE RELATIVELY QUICKLY. SYRIA DETERMINED

TO SQUELCH ANY FACTION BREAKING CEASE-FIRE AND
FULLY SUPPORTS SARKIS PROGRAM. IRAQI
FORCES IN LEBANON KNOW THEY FACE SIMPLE CHOICE BETWEEN
WITHDRAWAL OR DEATH. HE DID NOT DIRECTLY ADDRESS ISSUE
OF RETURN OF PALESTINIANS TO SOUTHERN LEBANON AND
RESULTANT POTENTIAL FOR OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT. HOWEVER,
THRUST OF HIS COMMENTS WAS THAT NOTHING WOULD BE ALLOWED
TO HAPPEN ANYWHERE IN LEBANON WHICH WOULD RISK BREAKING
OF CEASE-FIRE. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER RETURNING FROM MY MORNING MEETING WITH
KHADDAM TO PRESENT AGREED TALKING POINTS ON LEBANON. (DAMASCUS 7821).
I RECEIVED UNEXPECTED SUMMONS TO THE PRESIDENCY. ASAD HAS JUST COME

BACK FROM HIS HOME VILLAGE NEAR LATTAKI AND PUT ME
FIRST ON HIS LIST OF APPOINTMENTS. OUR MEETING IN
AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 14 LASTED TWO HOURS. ASAD WAS RELAXED
AND CORDIAL THROUGHOUT.

3. U.S. ELECTIONS:

AS KHADDAM HAD DONE IN OUR EARLIER MEETING, ASAD DISPLAYED
A LIVELY INTEREST IN U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND, AS HE
PROBED FOR HINTS OF ANY NEW DIRECTION IN U.S. FOREIGN
POLICY, PARTICULARLY AFFECTING THE MIDDLE EAST, SHOWED HOW
CLOSELY HE HAD FOLLOWED THE ACTUAL VOTING. AS I
HAD SAID TO KHADDAM, I TOLD ASAD THAT THE NEW TEAM
WILL NEED TIME TO STUDY IN DEPTH THE MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY
ISSUES FOR WHICH IT BECOMES RESPONSIBLE IN JANUARY.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH MAY HAVE COME OUT ON THE PUBLIC
RECORD ABOUT THESE ISSUES, DETAILED EXAMINATION OF
THE NEGOTIATING HISTORY OF EACH WOULD BE REQUIRED.
HE, ASAD, MUST ALLOW THE PRESIDENT-ELECT SUFFICIENT
TIME FOR SUCH STUDY. STRESSED THAT AS A GOVERNMENT AND A PEOPLE
WE HAD LONG BEEN PROUD OF BIPARTISANSHIP IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY
AND REMINDED HIM OF YOUR EARLIER MESSAGE THAT YOU WOULD

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BE SHORTLY DISCUSSING ALL ASPECTS OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY
WITH THE DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESIDENT-
ELECT AND THAT YOU INTENDED TO STRESS ESSENTIALITY OF
MAKING EARLY PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.
ALSO RECALLED YOUR ASSURANCE YOU WOULD INSURE THE NEW
ADMINISTRATION IS FULLY INFORMED OF THE EVOLUTION OF
SYRIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS.

4. ASAD ASKED SEVERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW BIPARTISANSHIP WAS ACHIEVED IN THE UNITED STATES AND SEEMED FASCINATED TO HEAR ABOUT THE STEADY CONTACTS BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND CONGRESS AND HOW THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE USED MEDIUM OF THEIR PRESS CONFERENCES TO HELP FORM A PUBLIC CONSENSUS IN FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS. HE ENDED THIS SECTION OF OUR DISCUSSION WITH THE COMMENT, "I APPRECIATE THAT THE PRESIDENT-ELECT WILL NEED TIME TO STUDY MIDDLE EAST QUESTIONS IN DEPTH AND DETAIL. WE ARE WILLING TO WAIT, ALTHOUGH PERSONALLY I HAVE ASSUMED THAT A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY WOULD BE FULLY INFORMED ON MAJOR WORLD ISSUES BEFORE THE ELECTION."

5. I THEN PRESENTED THE AGREED TALKING POINTS ON ARMS FOR ISRAEL AND LEBANON, NOTING I HAD EARLIER PRESENTED POINTS RE LEBANON TO KHADDAM. ASAD LISTENED INTENTLY TO THE POINTS ON ARMS FOR ISRAEL BUT MADE NO SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT. CONCERNING LEBANON, HE DID NOT ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF THE SENSITIVITY OF SOUTH LEBANON AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT, BUT, I BELIEVE, CLEARLY ABSORBED THE IMPORT OF OUR PRESENTATION. (KHADDAM HAD SIMILARLY AVOIDED MAKING ANY DIRECT COMMENT ON THIS ISSUE.)

6. IN RESPONSE TO YOUR REQUEST FOR HIS IDEA ON WHAT LIES AHEAD IN THE AREA, ASAD BEGAN WITH GENERALITIES AND CONFINED HIMSELF LARGELY TO COMMENTS ABOUT THE LEBANESE SCENE. IT APPEARS, HE SAID, "MATTERS ARE FOLLOWING A GOOD COURSE IN LEBANON." THE ADF HAD ALREADY OCCUPIED THE BEIRUT SUBURBS. ITS COMPOSITION IS AND WILL LIKELY REMAIN BASICALLY SYRIAN, ALTHOUGH HE HAD URGED A WIDER ARAB PARTICIPATION. IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IF THE ADF ENCOUNTERED SOME DIFFICULTIES BUT, HE ADDED, "WE EXPECT TO OVERCOME ANY PROBLEMS WHICH MAY APPEAR."

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SOME OF THE PARTIES ARE TRYING TO APPEAR RESPONSIVE TO THE PEACE PROCESS PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOW CONVINCED THAT THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO STOP PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE." SYRIA'S ATTITUDE, BOTH POLITICAL AND MILITARY, WAS CLEAR. IT WILL NOT CONDONE ACTION BY ANY FACTION WHICH TRIES TO RESUME FIGHTING.

7. PRESIDENT NOTED THAT HE EXPECTED THE ADF SOON TO ENTER ALL DISTRICTS OF THE CAPITAL TO ESTABLISH SECURITY. IT WOULD THEN MOVE TO QUIET OTHER TROUBLED CENTERS OF THE COUNTRY. "THEN OTHER PHASES IN THE PEACE PROCESS MUST BE UNDERTAKEN. ALL IN ALL, MATTERS ARE NOT MOVING BADLY, BUT WE CANNOT LET OURSELVES BE OVEROPTIMISTIC." HE CONCLUDED BY AFFIRMING THAT SYRIAN COOPERATION WITH SARKIS WAS EXCELLENT;

THE LEBANESE PRESIDENT WAS WORKING IN A LOGICAL AND REASON-
ABLE WAY TO REESTABLISH STABILITY AND DAMASCUS WOULD
SUPPORT HIM TO THE HILT.

8. I ASKED IF HIS COMMENT THAT CERTAIN PARTIES WERE
ONLY APPEARING TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE PEACE PROCESS WAS
DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY AT THE PALESTINAIN REJECTIONIST
FRONT. ASAD REPLIED THAT THE REJECTIONISTS WERE AMONG
THOSE UNCONVINCED ABOUT THE PEACE PROCESS, BUT THEY
WERE DEFINITELY NOT ALONE ON THIS. SOME LEBANESE
PARTIES SHOWED SIGNS OF NEGATIVE THINKING.
HOWEVER, HE SAW NO SERIOUS GROUNDS TO BE APPREHENSIVE
ABOUT THE PEACE PROSPECTS FOR LEBANON. DESPITE THE
LARGE AMOUNT OF ARMS CONTROLLED BY CERTAIN FACTIONS,
THOSE WHO WISHED TO GO BACK TO WAR WERE IN A WEAK
POSITION. TO RESUME FIGHTING WOULD BE AGAINST THE WILL
OF THE MAJORITY. THEY MUST ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THEIR
PAST MILITARY FAILURES, AND THEREFORE, WHAT TO
EXPECT SHOULD THEY RESUME FIGHTING. HE THEN RECALLED
THAT THE REJECTIONIST FRONT HAD ONLY A FEW DAYS AGO
PLEDGED ITS SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH PEACE.
THIS WAS AN ENCOURAGING SIGN.

9. ASKED HOW LONG HE THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE SARKIS TO
ORGANIZE AN EFFECTIVE SECURITY FORCE, ASAD SAID THIS WAS
THE HARDEST QUESTION. NEITHER HE NOR SARKIS WERE INCLINED
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TO SET AN ARBITRARY NUMBER OF DAYS FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT OF
THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES NEEDED TO RESTORE PEACE AND SECURITY
THROUGHOUT LEBANON. SARKIS, HE NOTED DRILY, SEEMED
COMMITTED TO A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS. SARKIS MUST FIRST
SECURE A CEASE-FIRE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. ASAD DID NOT
BELIEVE THIS NEED TAKE ALONG. WHEN A COUNTRY-WIDE CEASE-
FIRE IS ACCOMPLISHED, ASAD BELIEVED THAT WITHIN A RELATIVELY
SHORT TIME THEREAFTER IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO COLLECT THE HEAVY
WEAPONS FROM ALL FACTIONS. TO DISARM THE POPULATION
AND ESTABLISH "REAL PEACE" WOULD TAKE MUCH LONGER. I
MENTIONED WE HAD HEARD ONE PROPOSAL WAS TO HAVE EACH FACTION
DEPOSIT ITS WEAPONS IN A SEPARATE ARMS DEPOT WHICH WOULD
THEN BE PUT UNDER ADF CONTROL. NOTED THAT KHADDAM HAD
EARLIER THAT DAY DISMISSED THIS PLAN AS UNWORKABLE
BECAUSE THE TROUBLE WITH INDIVIDUAL ARMS DEPOTS WAS THAT
THERE COULD BE MORE THAN ONE KEY MADE FOR EACH DOOR. ASAD
SAID THE IDEA HAD INDEED BEEN DISCUSSED AND, UNLIKE
KHADDAM, HE DID NOT DISMISS IT OUT OF HAND. HE ADDED,
HOWEVER, THAT VARIOUS FACTIONS HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO HIDE
THEIR HEAVY WEAPONS TO AVOID CONFISCATION.

10. IRAQ:

I ASKED ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR AN EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF IRAQI TROOPS FROM LEBANON. ASAD REPLIED GRIMLY THAT THE IRAQIS HAD ALREADY BEEN GIVEN A CLEAR CHOICE BETWEEN WITHDRAWING FROM OR DYING IN LEBANON. HE HOPED THEY WOULD CHOOSE THE FORMER COURSE. HE THEN NOTED THAT BAGHDAD WITHIN THE LAST TEN DAYS HAD SENT FURTHER TROOPS TO JOIN ITS MAJOR ARMY MANUEVERS ALONG SYRIA'S EASTERN BORDER. SYRIA WAS NOT CONCERNED BY THE FACT THAT IRAQ HAD NOT YET BEGUN TO WITHDRAW THOSE TROOPS, BUT WAS NATURALLY FOLLOWING THE SITUATION CLOSELY. HE COMMENTED THAT IT APPEARED IRAQ WISHED TO MINIMIZE THE NUMBER OF REGULAR ARMY UNITS IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF BAGHDAD AND LEFT THE OBVIOUS IMPLICATION HANGING IN MID AIR.

11. ASAD WARMLY RECIPROCATED YOUR GREETINGS AND SAID HE WILL BE SEND A FORMAL ANSWER TO YOUR LETTER (STATE 273497) IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.

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12. COMMENT:

THRUST OF ASAD'S PRESENTATION, IT SEEMS TO ME, IS THAT HE WILL, WITHOUT EVER ACKNOLWEDGING HE IS SO DOING, WORK TO KEEP CONDITIONS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON FROM PROVOKING A CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL. I WAS ALSO STRUCK BY HIS SELF-CONFIDENT, IF TACIT, ASSUMPTION THAT SYRIAN FORCES WILL BE ACTIVE AND ACCEPTABLE IN LEBANON FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD.

13. SUGGEST DEPT PASS THIS MESSAGE TO BEIRUT AND CAIRO.
MURPHY UNQTE KISSINGER

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